

Draft
White Paper
New Jersey Special Review Assessment
New Jersey Department of Education
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Background

New Jersey has a long history of assessing students' skills as a requirement for graduation. Beginning with the *Test of Minimum Basic Skills* in the 1980s, New Jersey has sought to assure that students have acquired skill sets deemed necessary to be successful in society. The assessment program for high school students has evolved through two versions of the *High School Proficiency Test* (HSPT) to the current *High School Proficiency Assessment* (HSPA).

SRA Background

From the beginning of the high school testing system, recognition has been given to the fact that not all students perform well on standardized or other forms of statewide tests. Indeed, some students have ~~very~~ legitimate reasons for not being included in the regular standardized assessment system. For those students, the *Special Review Assessment* (SRA) was developed. The SRA originally used materials developed by the local school district to determine a student's understanding of the objectives set forth for graduation. Through time, the assessment came to be developed at the state level and administered locally by the high schools in New Jersey.

Original intent of the SRA

The original intent of the SRA was to provide a way for those students who met very specific criteria through the Child Study Team in each district to demonstrate proficiency. Mainly this was for students deemed to be "test

phobic”. Over the course of time the SRA was used for students who have limited English proficiency and many special education students. Beginning in 1991, the New Jersey administrative code was changed to include all students who did not pass the HSPT in the SRA program. Thus the program emphasis shifted from an alternate way for specific students to demonstrate proficiency to a program that allowed all students the opportunity. Beginning with introduction of the HSPA in 2002, all students who did not score “proficient” on one or more tests were included in the SRA process.

Changing SRA populations

A summary of the SRA Annual Survey for 2002, the final year for the HSPT, shows a total of 9,489 SRAs were submitted and approved. Of those, 7,559 were for general education students, 1,670 were for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and 260 were for special education students. A fundamental shift from using the SRA for special needs and LEP students to include using it for general education students has occurred through time. As of the time of this report, the 2003 survey data are not yet available.

Special education exemptions

Beyond the numbers of general education students participating in the SRA, there are also approximately 7,000 students who receive special education exemptions from the HSPA graduation requirement. Such exemptions result from changes in the student’s Individual Educational Plan (IEP). Therefore, the original use SRA for special education students has been replaced by the increased use of the special education exemption process.

The SRA Process

The SRA process has two major components. They are (1) remedial coursework and (2) the administration of the Performance Assessment Tasks (PATs). The remedial coursework is to begin in a timely manner after receipt of the individual score report showing the student's failure on the HSPA. This

SRA Process – remediation & performance tasks
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coursework focuses on the specific area(s) of weakness as identified by the scores attained in each test of the HSPA.

The second component of the process, the administration of the SRA, allows students to demonstrate attainment of knowledge through the successful completion of PATs for each content area. The PATs, developed at a state level, are administered and scored locally. Scorers are trained on the use of rubrics for scoring. Upon successful completion of the required number of PATs, the student has been deemed to have demonstrated the appropriate acquisition of skills.

Students who are in the SRA process continue to take subsequent administrations of the HSPA until they show proficiency by the score attained on the HSPA or demonstrate their knowledge by the successful completion of the SRA. Students who do not demonstrate the appropriate level of knowledge through either instrument are not eligible for a diploma.

Issues

Tests and graduation requirements
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Beginning in 2003, all students, irrespective of special education status, LEP status or other conditions will have to be tested at least once in

high school in language arts literacy, math and science under the “No Child Left Behind” Act. New Jersey finds itself as one of twenty states currently using a high school exit examinations as a requirement for graduation from high school. Several more states will be making including a test as part of graduation requirements in the coming years. While currently the majority of states do not have plans to make a test a requirement for graduation, several states do allow local districts to include results of a statewide test in their graduation requirements. For states that do have an exit exam, the tests are mainly criterion-referenced, that is, tied to state or other standards. Accommodations of varying sorts are allowed for special education and LEP students and students with 504 accommodations (Council of Chief State

Multiple opportunities

School Officers, 2002).

Special education and graduation requirement options

According to the Center on Education Policy (2002), all states that have high school exit exams offer multiple opportunities for students to retake the tests. In several states testing begins as early as a student’s sophomore year. Some states also offer students alternatives to the regular tests if there are special education concerns. By 2008, there will be five states that offer exemptions (from the requirement for a diploma, not from testing) for special

Tiered diplomas

education students and nine states which offer an alternative assessment for these students. Additionally, several states have a tiered diploma system. States who have such a system are offering a less than standard diploma, a certificate of attendance or completion as examples, for special education students or for those students who do not pass the exit examination. For

example, Massachusetts issues a “Certificate of Attainment” for students who have completed all local requirements but have not shown proficiency through the statewide testing system. Pennsylvania’s system does not deny a diploma for students who do not pass the statewide test, but rather issues certificates of proficiency for students who score a proficient or advanced proficient score on the test.

LEP Students

Second language tests are rare

For LEP students, all states with exit exams require the same tests as other students, often with accommodations. By 2008, eighteen states plan to allow for accommodations. However, in only four states are exit exams (other than language arts literacy) translated into other languages. Only one additional state plans to do so by 2008 (Center on Education Policy, 2002).

New York’s Program

One state, New York, has an extremely comprehensive exit examination system. In order to graduate from high school, students must pass five sections of the New York Regents Examination. Namely, they are English, math, science, and two tests in social studies. Students failing the science and social examinations may take the tests as often as needed. Students who fail the English and math test two times become eligible for re-testing in only those components of each test in which they showed a deficiency.

SRA is unique

New Jersey alone offers an assessment like the SRA which is developed on a statewide level, yet is administered and scored on a local level. There are some inherent issues that arise in such a system.

SRA problems

- It is nearly impossible for the state to monitor the conditions in which the SRA is administered.

- The secure storage of materials is another challenge to the validity of the system.
- Although the department provides clear direction in the selection of PATs and criteria for the appropriate scorers, there is little capacity to audit all districts to ensure compliance.
- It is not feasible to perform the widespread re-scoring of student papers to necessary to determine the level of local scoring reliability.
- Historically, little, if any, auditing of the process has been used systematically.

Currently, the department is implementing a paper audit. This, however, does not allow for the ability to determine how and when the SRA is administered since the PATs are administered at a variety of times depending on individual student preparedness.

The county offices must give final approval to the SRAs in order for students to graduate. Due to the number of SRAs in most counties, it is not possible to review all of the PAT results submitted. A sampling, based on the total number submitted, is conducted. This, unfortunately, can not fully ensure that all students have met the standards which have been set.

The large number of general education students who meet the standards criteria through the SRA is also an area of concern. A conclusion that one could readily draw from the number of general education students participating is that issues lie not with individual students, but rather with educational programs.

Recommendations

Recommendation— Eliminate the SRA

Given the challenges that the SRA presents, and the fact that no other states have such a process, the elimination of the SRA would be a prudent and acceptable choice. Students in other states where exit examinations are required, either meet the standard on the general test or an alternative assessment, or do not graduate. Philosophically we seek more options for our students. Therefore, the recommendations contain options for both testing as well as remediation. The testing recommendations continue the opportunities for accommodations for special education and LEP students to ensure multiple paths for students to demonstrate their proficiency.

TESTING:

1. **Discontinue the use of the SRA as an alternative means of demonstrating proficiency on the New Jersey Core Content Curriculum Standards.** Students who fail to achieve proficiency on any of the HSPA administrations will not be eligible for a New Jersey Diploma. **Students entering ninth grade on or after September of 2004 will be subject to the provisions of this policy.**
2. Move the initial administration of HSPA earlier in the eleventh grade.
3. Continue the use of exemptions from multiple testing as a graduation requirement for certain special education students.
4. Develop translated and/or sheltered-English versions of both HSPA and GEPA to allow LEP students to demonstrate proficiency. The translated

Testing Recommendations

and/or sheltered English version of the HPSA for LEP students would be available only for those students who have entered U.S. schools after eighth grade.

5. Use, subject for federal approval, the sheltered English versions as an accommodated version for selected special education students.

REMEDIATION:

1. Students who fail to achieve proficiency on the eighth grade test (GEPA) must have a remediation plan developed as a part of their ninth grade schedule;
2. Students who fail the HPSA in its initial administration shall be eligible to participate in a menu of remediation programs including, but not limited to, attendance at state supported regional summer academies created specifically to address Core Curriculum Content Standards deficiencies as identified via HSPA. Such programs will be available during the summer. Such academies will be staffed by teachers identified for their success with the needs and students associated with lack of proficiency demonstration. Participation in these academies is voluntary.
3. Students who fail to achieve proficiency in the initial administration of HSPA will have at least two additional opportunities to satisfy the standard in the areas in which they have failed to demonstrate proficiency.
4. The department will work with the state's two year colleges to develop special programs for students who do not satisfy the proficiency requirements by the end of twelfth grade.

5. Students who cannot demonstrate proficiency via this system of multiple assessments and/or remediation opportunities will be awarded a certificate of attainment, providing they have satisfied all other graduations requirements.
6. The current GED path remains open to all students who fail to demonstrate proficiency via the multiple paths described above or who have exceeded the age of 21.
7. A limited appeal process shall be available through the Commissioner's office for students who have:
 - a. Attended school an average of 90% over the last two years of school;
 - b. Attended and fully participated in the voluntary summer programs, and;
 - c. A letter specifying the effort made and problems encountered in attaining proficiency in the Core Content Curriculum Standards.
Such letter must be sent by the parent(s), guidance counselor and principal.

The desire to give all students every chance for success is strong for all of those involved in education. It is also important to be sure that the success students achieve is through high standards. Providing alternatives for those students who need them, special education, LEP and students who are diagnosed as being afraid of standardized testing, is appropriate and should continue.

References

Center on Education Policy (2002); State high school exit exams: a baseline report; Washington, D.C.

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (2002); Key state education policies on pk-12 Education: 2002; Washington, D.C.